

MR. STOW'S SERMON

ON THE

EFFICIENCY OF PRIMITIVE MISSIONS.

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A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE BAPTIST
DENOMINATION IN THE UNITED STATES,

AT ITS

NINTH TRIENNIAL SESSION, HELD IN THE OLIVER STREET
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BY

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DEAR BROTHER,

The Convention having committed to the Board the duty of publishing your valuable Sermon, delivered before it at the opening of its late session, the Board yesterday voted unanimously to solicit of you the manuscript for publication.

Allow us to present their wishes at this early date, and to express the hope, that you will consent to the arrangement.

With affectionate respect,

Yours, &c.,

LUCIUS BOLLES,
SOLOMON PECK, } *Secretaries.*
HOWARD MALCOM, }

REV. BARON STOW.

DISCOURSE.

ACTS 12: 24.

THE WORD OF GOD GREW AND MULTIPLIED

THE success of the first Christians in their missionary enterprises, has long been regarded as one of the most remarkable facts in history. Their beginning was small and peculiarly unpromising; but in less time than has elapsed since William Carey commenced in Bengal, they had preached the gospel and organized churches throughout all Palestine, and almost all Asia Minor, through Macedonia, Greece, the islands of the Ægean sea, and along the sea-coast of Africa, and passed on to Rome, the mistress of the world. In a few years more, they were found doing their Master's work, and rejoicing in their Master's blessing, in every known nation from Cape Comorin to Britain, from Scythia to the Pillars of Hercules. A historian of the second century says that in his time, Asia, Africa and Europe "abounded with Christians."

Yet such were the circumstances under which Christianity was then propagated, that upon the ordinary principles of human calculation, any man, not a fanatic, would have pronounced the enterprise impracticable. A candid consideration of these circumstances has wrought conviction in favor of the divinity of our religion in many a mind that was utterly impervious to every other species of evidence.

Who were the first preachers and advocates of the Christian religion? What was their number? What their origin, their standing, their education, their personal influence? Were they the agents that human sagacity would have selected for such an undertaking?

What was the character of the religion which they would propagate? Was it such as the world, Jewish and Pagan, would be likely to welcome with grateful enthusiasm? What were its doctrines? What its precepts? What did it prohibit? What require?

What was the state of the world, the whole world, to which they were commanded to preach the gospel, and for whose subjugation to Christ they were pledged to labor even unto the death? Had Judaism become superannuated and decrepid, so that its hold of the children of Abraham could easily be relaxed, and Christianity, with little difficulty, be substituted in its place? Was Paganism in its dotage, and "ready to vanish away?" Did the systems of philosophy, then popular, predispose the mind of the age to a prompt reception of such a system as that of Jesus of Nazareth?

What were the malignant and persevering efforts, not only to obstruct the progress of the new religion, but to suppress and exterminate it from the earth? So far did one emperor, Diocletian, proudly imagine that he had succeeded, that he caused a medal to be struck with the inscription, *Nomine Christianorum deleto*,—the Christian name obliterated.

Yet the disciples of Christ, nothing daunted, went forward as bidden by their Lord, and, transcending all barriers, and pressing their way through all difficulties, conveyed the life-giving doctrine to millions of the perishing, and caused earth and heaven to exult together over its wide-spread and salutary triumphs. This we have called a remarkable fact. The unbelieving Gibbon so considered it, and, without venturing to question its reality, exhausted his rare ingenuity in the attempt to account for it upon principles that should exclude all recognition of the divine original of the system.

There is another remarkable fact, that we are sure will be so regarded by future generations, and that will be no less perplexing to the philosophic historian;—and that is, *The slow progress of the gospel in the nineteenth century*. The Karen inquirer says to our missionary,* “If so long time has elapsed since the crucifixion of Christ, why has not this good news reached us before? Why have so many generations of our fathers gone down to hell for want of it?” But these are not the questions

* Journal of Rev. J. H. Vinton, Bap. Miss. Mag., Vol. xviii, p. 83.

which we would now propose. We ask not, How it is that, after eighteen hundred years, so much of the world is covered with pagan darkness? We ask not, How it has happened that for more than a thousand years so large a proportion of the pagan world has been suffered to remain unvisited by Christian heralds? We leave it for our fathers, now in eternity, to answer for themselves to their holy Judge. We simply inquire, How is it that now, as the church professes to understand her obligation, she does not feel its pressure and act in accordance with its dictates? How is it, that with her present knowledge of the heathen world, her aggregate of numbers, her intellectual and physical resources, her triumphs are so comparatively limited?

Just in proportion as our missionary endeavors, in character, motive, spirit, resemble those of the primitive church, they are unquestionably as effective. But let us compare our circumstances with theirs, and who will account for the mighty difference between the results of their missions and ours?

They had no better truth, nor more of it than we have. The gospel which we preach to a sinful world is precisely the same as they preached. It has lost none of its adaptedness to man's condition, —none of its power to regenerate and save.

They had no better hearts to deal with than we have. It does not appear that man has deteriorated, either in intellect or morals, so as to render our task more difficult than theirs. He was then totally depraved; he is only that now. They did not find

the heathen more accessible or more susceptible of impression than we find them. The minds which they addressed, like those which we address, were preoccupied by opinions, and moulded into habits, all directly and sternly repugnant to the spirit of Christianity. Every thing that most powerfully influences and tyrannizes over the human soul,—as superstition, custom, policy, interest, pride, passion, law, philosophy, religion,—was decidedly hostile to the genius and claims of the gospel.

The divine influence that accompanied their labors, and without which even *they* would have been unsuccessful, was not different in any respect, except perhaps in amount, from that with which we are favored. They lived under the dispensation of the Spirit. We live under the same dispensation. If the Holy Spirit rendered them peculiarly successful, it was not an act of arbitrary sovereignty, but an equitable adjustment, proportioning the blessing to their measure of fidelity and devotedness. Such were the character and extent of their labors, that he could consistently show them special favor. In blessing them, therefore, he offered no premium to indolence, gave no countenance to antinomian presumption. When we shall live and labor as they did, we shall find, either that there is no truth in the promise, or that our exertions are rendered equally effectual by the Spirit's energy.

In what respect did the ability of the primitive church surpass ours? Had she greater wealth or intelligence, or more of any thing which we reckon

under the denomination of resources? Was her ministry distinguished by extraordinary talent, or superior intellectual training? A few, we admit, and only a few, were divinely inspired,—and they especially for the purpose of filling up the canon of Scripture; but who can show that their inspiration gave them power over a single heart, or added a single convert to the church of Christ?

All the external advantages are decidedly in our favor. We have knowledge of the state of the world which they had not. We have greater facilities of intercourse both by land and water. We have the printing-press, a potent instrument, whose powers, not yet half developed, shall astonish and bless the nations. We have equally with them the force of the argument from miracles and prophecy, and we have the additional argument derived from the propagation of Christianity, its indestructibility either by internal corruption or external oppression, the perpetuity of its institutions, the preservation of the Scriptures, the continued fulfilment of prophecy, and the benign influence of the gospel upon individual, domestic, and national welfare. Nor should we forget the fact, that the missionary enterprise has in our day secured to itself no small portion of secular respectability. Multitudes, who have no sympathy with its nobler aims, are disposed to regard it with favor, and to aid it forward, merely on account of its indirect results. If in our main object, the salvation of souls from sin and death, they see

no point of attraction, yet in the subserviency of missions to literature, science, commerce, civilization, they find something that is congenial to their taste, something which as scholars, philanthropists, merchants, they can admire, something to prompt them to be liberal to a degree that ought to shame the Christian for his parsimony. Foreign missions have acquired a character and a position in the public mind, to which in the days of the apostles they were strangers.

Yet notwithstanding circumstances are so much in our favor, they made advances in the production of effect, such as we have never witnessed. Without the world's favorite instrumentality, learning, eloquence, wealth, arms,—nay, with all these leagued against them, and in the face of them all, the primitive church expanded, and achieved triumph after triumph,—all the triumphs of truth and holiness. All the apparatus of torture and death was brought out and arrayed in her path to arrest her progress, but heedless of its terrors, she moved forward to the consummation of her lofty purpose. Some of her most malignant foes became her devoted champions and even martyrs, and every day new territories were added to her growing empire. Persecution often kindled her fires, and with her blood she as often extinguished them. Her progress from place to place was marked by the dethronement of idol deities, and the fall of idol temples; on the high places of idolatry she planted her banners; and in all lands, known to the merchant, the traveller, the

warrior, the trophies of her power were multiplied. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

The question recurs:—How shall we account for this difference in efficiency, between their missions and ours? The suggestion of a few considerations by way of reply may not be unsuitable.

I. THE TYPE OF THEIR PIETY.

The piety of not only the ministry, but of the church in general, was missionary piety. Just suppose that the great majority of Christians were as spiritual, as dead to the world, as active for God, as we require our missionaries to be, and as some of them actually are, and you have a tolerable idea of the religious character of the early church. When believers then gave themselves to Christ, it was a *bona fide* transaction. They did not enter his service as an experiment, or on probation, but unconditionally, unreservedly, and for eternity. They gave up all for him,—they consecrated all to him. In "simplicity and godly sincerity," with a lively sense of his worthiness, and of the legitimacy of his claims, they surrendered themselves, body and soul, to him as their proprietor and ruler, as well as Saviour and friend. Willing to be his, desirous to be his, they became his by voluntary covenant,—"his own," in every possible sense, nominally, really, and for ever.

The distinguishing traits of their piety were strongly developed, and obvious to all.

1. *Great love.* On no part of the Christian character does the New Testament so frequently and strenuously insist, as on this—on none does it pass so many and deserved encomiums. Whatever else a man might have, if deficient in love, he was regarded as defective in the primary and essential element of evangelical godliness. They understood that “love is the fulfilling of the law.”

The early Christians had great love to *the Saviour*. They remembered the thrice-repeated and searching interrogation, proposed under the most impressive circumstances on the shore of Tiberias, “Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest thou me?*” It burnt deep into their souls the conviction that love to him must be the fundamental element of their character, the main-spring of all their action. Hence we find them uniformly and studiously cultivating this affection, that so they may never be lacking in the impulsive power appropriate to their calling,—that so they may ever with sincerity appeal to the Searcher of hearts, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that we love thee.” When Dr. Doddridge entered the dungeon of a prisoner, with a reprieve which he had obtained for him, the poor man fell down at his feet and exclaimed, “I will be yours! Wherever you go, I am yours! Sir, every drop of my blood thanks you, for you have had mercy upon every drop of it!” Similar were the feelings of the first Christians towards their redeeming Lord,—similar their protestations of gratitude, attachment and allegiance. “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” The love of

Christ,—both his love to them, and their love to him,—the latter being only a reduplication of the former,—constrained them to live, not unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again. To please him was their primary object. To please him they cultivated personal holiness. To please him they labored for the conversion of souls. To please him they urged their missionary inroads into remote regions, encountered the most appalling dangers, endured the severest hardships, and faced death in its fiercest forms.

This love unquestionably exists in modern Christians in a degree; but, alas! in a too diminished degree. It is not in us, as it was in them, a burning passion, a fire giving impulse to the whole machinery of our being. If it were, it would impel us onward to similar sacrifices, labors, conflicts, victories.

They had great love to *one another*. Brotherly love is seldom seen in our day just as it existed among the early Christians. With them it was a test of discipleship, an elementary principle, devoid of which, a man could not obtain, from saint or sinner, from angel or devil, even the name of Christian. Without this they did not pretend to consider themselves as the children of God. “We know,” said they, “that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” The absence of brotherly love was one of the criterions by which antichrist was to be known. Its presence was to furnish indisputable proof both of the divine mission of their Master and of their attachment to his cause.

Jesus prayed that his disciples might *all* be one, to the end that the world might believe that the Father had sent him. And to them he declared, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." And the world, as they beheld the chain of fraternal affection running through all hearts, uniting them firmly to each other, and connecting the whole inseparably with the throne of love, felt and confessed the force of the demonstration. Their brotherly love, which was really a divine instinct, an essential property of their new nature, and therefore spontaneous and unmodified by external circumstances, stood forth in strong contrast with the selfishness of the world around them, like the verdure of paradise set in the desert, and drew forth from their bitterest enemies involuntary expressions of wonder. The unbelieving historian, before cited, in his attempt to account for their astonishing success in propagating their religion, alleges as one of the most powerful causes, their affectionate union. Then there was but one denomination of Christians.* "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Consequently there were no clashing creeds, no sectarian bickerings, no rival interests, no party plottings and counterplottings, no wasteful

* It can hardly be necessary to qualify this general statement, by the admission that even before the apostles were all dead, the church was vexed with false teachers and consequent heresies. These were very limited in their extent, and never affected the great body of believers. On some points of unrevealed doctrine there were diversities of opinion; but, in the language of Waddington, "their variations were without schism, and their differences without acrimony."

expenditure of time, and feeling, and moral energy, in attempts to maintain and fortify party positions. "By one Spirit" they were "all baptized into *one* body," and they regarded themselves, and were regarded by all around them, as members of *one* harmonious and devoted brotherhood. Christ was the centre of attraction, around which they rallied and united, and, like the radii of a circle, the nearer they drew to the centre, the nearer they were to each other. Assimilated by the grace of God, and fused and welded by the fires of persecution, their affinity and cohesion rendered them the admiration of the world that hated them, and gave them a moral power which the modern church does not possess, and never will possess, until brotherly love shall resume its ancient influence, and become, as it then was, a "bond of perfectness,"—until "the multitude of them that believe" shall be "of one heart and one way," keeping "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." O when will the "whole family" of Christ become one, and with "hearts knit together in love," discontinue their petty controversies among themselves, and, following their one Leader, converge and direct their whole energies towards the one point, the salvation of the human soul? We may speculate as we please about the incidental advantages of our division into sects or denominations, comparing them poetically to the prismatic hues of the rainbow, and from the pulpit and the platform shouting in extacy, "*E pluribus unum!*" But the practical man will tell us that if we would dissolve

the intractable substances of earth, we must have the colorless ray of virgin light.

The religion of the first Christians was essentially *philanthropic*. They had great love to man. As the creature of God, as a fellow-being, as a sinner lost and helpless, as the one for whom their Master died, as bound with them to a common destiny, they loved him and sought his good. O how different was their philanthropy from that of the atheistic philosophers, with which, at the close of the last century, a portion of the eastern hemisphere was deeply cursed. They talked of love, universal, disinterested love. But O, such love! Who ever beheld its parallel? Love to man, but not men; love to every body in general, but to nobody in particular! The love of the early Christians comprehended every individual of their race. They loved mankind not only as a whole, but in detail; and in order to do good to the whole, they sought the improvement of the individuals. If fanaticism be, as defined by an able writer,* “Enthusiasm inflamed by hatred,” they, admitting them to be enthusiasts, were certainly not fanatics. Militant and aggressive as were their movements, not an enemy, however embittered and prejudiced, could charge them with malignant motives. Their enthusiasm was inflamed by *love*, and “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor.” Tender and affectionate, as if they had just come from leaning on the bosom of incarnate compassion, their words melted like honey on the hearts of the

* Isaac Taylor.

people, and by an invisible, irresistible influence, won them over from hostility to friendship. O yes, brethren, love, love, was one of the secrets of their power. Love of souls was with them both a principle and a passion, and, under its exhaustless impulse, what did they not endure, sacrifice, accomplish!

2. *Vigorous faith.* Nothing so debilitates a moral being, as unbelief. Nothing so girds him with strength, and renders him energetic and efficient, as intelligent confidence.

The primitive Christians had strong faith in the inspired account of man's condition and destiny. Confiding in revealed truth, they looked on him as deeply depraved, guilty, condemned, and, unless saved by the gospel, sure to perish for ever. This they believed in respect to the heathen as well as the Jews. Do we believe it as they did? "If one died for all,"—thus they reasoned,—“then were all dead.” How appalling the truth,—“all dead!”—all exposed to hell! They believed it,—they acted as if they believed it. They went forth and labored “unto the end,” under the full persuasion that every unbeliever would be damned. With such faith, how could they be inactive? And is not our comparative inertness attributable to our unbelief? “Lord, increase our faith!”

They had faith in the adaptedness of the gospel to the necessities of a depraved and perishing world. They believed what they said, that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation, to every one that

believeth,"—that it could remove from the penitent sinner, not only the external condemnation, but the inward defilement,—not only deliver him from the curse of the violated law, but bleach his polluted nature as white as heaven. They had faith in their own message, and none who heard them and saw the correspondence of their lives with the testimony of their lips, could gainsay their not immodest declaration, "We believe, and therefore speak." Can we, with no misgiving of conscience, with no fear of contradiction, adopt their language? Have we a confidence like theirs in the suitableness and efficacy of the gospel? Do we believe that it is the thing, and the only thing that can save the heathen from eternal hell?

They had faith in the rectitude and utility of their enterprise. They did not consider their time, strength, suffering, blood, as expended in a crusade uncalled for, undignified, misdirected. No, no. They had heard from the lips of their Master, the remarkable words, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you," and they had thence learned that their mission was identical with his, a continuation of the one grand design,—the salvation of "a multitude which no man could number." They regarded the cause as his, devised by his love, sustained by his power, and sure to prevail. Hence, in the depths of their dungeons, with the chains of a despot about them, they could exultingly say, "The word of God is not bound," and could even rejoice in the things which happened unto them, because they

contributed to "the furtherance of the gospel." If they were mortal, their enterprise was not. They might be like the foam of the billows which the tempests easily scatter; but their cause, resembling the eternal flow of ocean, should roll its fulness upon the most distant shores.

They believed that the work assigned them,—the preaching of the gospel to every creature,—could be done. Consequently they were the people to do it. A doubt as to its practicability would have unfitted them for the service. Brethren, do modern Christians,—do we believe, that the heathen world can be converted to God? Do we believe that with proper effort the earth can be "filled with the knowledge of the Lord," and the kingdom of Christ be made to outstretch its borders, until it shall encompass "all nations?" "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

They had the Saviour's promise to be with them and defend them, and give them success. His own words, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," were engraven in the metal of their souls, and they felt that he was able, with "all power," to make his promise good. How could they hesitate or falter? "Lo, I am with you," was enough to brace up their courage, and retain it firmly at the desirable point. Hence timidity was not even an accident of their character.

Such, and more than such was their faith, and under its invigorating and impulsive influence they

went forward, and quit themselves like men, Christian men. Brethren, is there a large amount of this faith in the existing church? Should the Son of Man come, how much of it would he find on the earth?

3. *Rigid self-denial.* When they gave themselves to Christ, they counted all things loss for him and his salvation; and the surrender was an honest, whole-hearted transaction, never to be reconsidered, never to be regretted.

Hence, from the hour of their conversion, they made little account of *property*. If it was confiscated by government, or destroyed by the mob, they "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods," assured that in heaven they had a better, an incorruptible inheritance. When the cause required, how ready were they to lay all at the feet of the Missionaries. Generally they were poor. A rich Christian! why, such a thing was hardly known. However it may be now, it was *then*, "easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." And if, as an act of special sovereignty, a man of wealth was converted, he seldom retained his riches for a long period; for such was his sympathy for the despoiled and suffering brotherhood, and such his solicitude for the conversion of the perishing, that his funds were poured forth as water. Yet poor as were the first Christians, they were liberal to a degree seldom surpassed. We from our much give little. They from their little gave much. Their "deep poverty

abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Baptized covetousness was the product of a later age.

Reputation was with them a matter of trivial consequence. We have often so much character to obtain, or to preserve, that we can spare neither time nor resources for the great work of promoting Christ's glory. But the early Christians, bishops and all, while they were careful to maintain consciences void of offence towards God and man, were not very sensitively concerned whether they stood high or low in the world's estimation. It therefore cost them very little to keep up a good reputation. That they left where they left their life, "hid with Christ in God."

They consulted not with flesh and blood, but sacrificed *personal ease*, and submitted to hardships and trials of which we know comparatively—most of us absolutely nothing. They were "men that hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus." Yes, for their religion they were ready to die, and for it they did die by hecatombs, and by dying for it they often accomplished more than by living and laboring for it. Hence the triumphant remark of Tertullian had quite as much truth as poetry:—"The more you mow us down, the thicker we rise; the Christian blood you spill is like the seed you sow; it springs from the earth and fructifies the more."

4. *Simple obedience.* They understood Christ to be in earnest, when, standing but one step from the throne of the universe, he said, "Go ye into all the

world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It was not therefore with them a matter to be considered whether they should go or not go. The command was positive and peremptory, and how could they escape from the obligation? With us, to stay is the rule, to go is the exception. With them, to go is the rule, to stay is the exception.* Wonder not that they accomplished so much. Wonder not that we accomplish so little. They did not wait indolently for openings, but went forth, either to find them or to make them. If defeated at one point, instead of returning to Jerusalem in despondency, and writing a book on the impracticability of Christian missions, they proceeded to another and perhaps more distant field, and then to another, and still another, until they had gone over the appointed territory. Their piety was ENTERPRISING; the spirit of obedience made it such.

Have we this spirit of obedience to the last command of the Lord Jesus? Let us not evade the question, but answer it. Why then is it necessary for so much to be said and done, by the pulpit and the press, by corresponding secretaries and travelling agents, to obtain our scanty supply of missionaries, and gather from a half million of Baptists, at the rate

* "It is not, as is commonly done, to be taken for granted, by those who come into the ministry, that they are to remain in their own Christian land, unless a case of duty can be made out for them to go to some unevangelized people: but it is to be taken for granted, that they are to be employed in conveying the gospel to some destitute people, unless a case of duty can be made out for them to remain in their own already Christian country." — *Dr. Wisner.*

of a shilling each, enough to send these few missionaries to six hundred millions of perishing heathen! O Jesus, is this thy church? Are these the people whom thou didst redeem by thy blood, and who with the first throbbings of the new heart have severally inquired, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" When Ko Chet-thing, the Karen convert, was in this country, he was urged on a certain occasion to address a congregation in respect to their duty to send out and support more missionaries. After a moment of downcast thoughtfulness, he asked with evident emotion, "Has not Jesus Christ told them to do it?" "O yes," was the reply, "but we wish you to remind them of their duty." "O no," said the Karen, "if they will not obey Jesus Christ, they will not obey me." He in his simplicity considered the command of the Master as paramount and all-sufficient.

It has been often said that in the hearts of our brethren there are fountains of benevolence. Ice-bound, it is acknowledged they may be, and pent in the rocks of ignorance and prejudice; yet if but a Moses go to them, and smite those rocks, the streams of charity, it is said, will flow forth to gladden all the desert. Indeed! And had the primitive Christians such Horeb hearts, yielding nothing to the cause of God, nothing to the claims of a suffering, dying world, until smitten by foreign force? Was the missionary enterprise in their day, a crouching mendicant, wandering among the churches, soliciting with a pauper's importunity the shreds and parings

of liberal incomes, and then proclaiming at every corner the name and residence of every donor of a half shekel, lest, forsooth, unless his reluctantly bestowed contribution should be loudly trumpeted, he might cease to care for the will of the Lord Jesus, and lose his interest in the salvation of a world, and the missionary treasury feel no more of the overflowings of his benevolence? Tell me, men, brethren and fathers, were such the Christians of the age of Barnabas, and Philemon, and Polycarp?

5. *Fervent prayer.* It has been remarked respecting a modern preacher, whose labors while living, were eminently blessed in the conversion of his hearers, and who, "being dead, yet speaketh," that the secret of his success lay in his devotional habits. He dwelt on the sides of eternity, and carried with him into his pulpit, and into all his intercourse with his people, the very atmosphere that circulates around the throne. Hence a member of his congregation once declared,—"When our pastor prays, it is right into the heart of God. When he preaches, it is right into the heart of the sinner." This description, true perhaps of a few moderns, is truer still of the great body of the ancient preachers. They had peculiar access to the hearts of men, because they had peculiar access to the ear and heart of God. With him and the glories around him they were familiar, and ever as they came forth from his presence, they brought to the people, fresh from the tree of life, the leaves that are for the healing of the nations,—

sparkling from the river of life, the waters "clear as crystal," that purify the unholy, and refresh the way-worn and weary.

Another pastor, whose success was proverbially great, when asked how it happened that under his ministry "the word of God" so "grew and multiplied," returned the significant answer, "I have a praying church." The early church was eminently a praying church. The sin of indevotion could not be laid to her charge. The oft-repeated and unanimous request of the apostles, "Pray for us," "Pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified," was never made in vain. Indeed, the request scarcely needed to be made. The Christians of those days waited not for a specified season, but at all times and every where they remembered before God the cause of missions, and the self-denying missionary laborers. In the closet, in the family, in the church, the burden of their prayer was, "Thy kingdom come." Every prayer-meeting was a concert of prayer for the universal spread of the gospel of Christ. And theirs were the effectual, fervent prayers that avail much. They knew how to touch that delicate chain which Jesus has passed over the throne, and by which the faintest spark of holy desire may be easily transmitted; and through it they sent a continual stream of invisible but powerful influence away into the deepest recesses of heathenism.

Such, in five of its aspects, was the type of their piety. Perceive we not good reasons why they

were so amazingly successful in propagating the gospel of Christ? And see we not, by comparison, satisfactory reasons why the gospel in our hands is so limited in its efficiency?

Another fact which gave a peculiarity to the missions of the primitive church, and doubtless conduced in large measure to their success, deserves to be considered.

II. THEIR PLAN OF ACTION.

If indeed that can be called *plan* which indicates no forecast, includes nothing of method, proceeds from no concert, and betrays the entire absence of all worldly wisdom. Yet in all their operations there were certain elements that exhibit, if not human sagacity, the supervision of a master mind that understands human nature, and knows how to adapt the means to the end.

1. *Unity of object.* They considered that it was their calling, their very business as Christians, to propagate the religion that they loved. Hence every one felt it incumbent on him, whether others joined him or not, to do whatever he could for the object. "I cannot *speak* for Christ," said a martyr on his way to the flames, "but I can *die* for him." That was the pervading spirit. "If I cannot do every thing, I can do something. 'This one thing I do;' I labor, 'according to the ability that God giveth,' for the conversion of the world." This was

the end they contemplated with unwavering eye ; this the point toward which they pressed with unflinching movement. To this end they devoted their thinking, feeling, acting, praying. For this they earned, for this they gave their money, and ever found it, as you may find it to-night, "more blessed to give than to receive." For this they toiled, and suffered, and counted not their lives dear unto themselves. O they were Christians worthy of the name. Like their Master, they had one thing to do, and how were they straitened until it was accomplished !

What was the master passion of the primitive church ? What but a burning desire for the salvation of the guilty and the perishing of their race ? Hence, having one object, their feeling and action were intense, and they moved onward with a momentum which the nature of mind forbade to be more, which the principles that actuated them forbade to be less. We occasionally see an individual of our own circle, cherishing the same high purpose, living as if he had one, only one object,—the glory of God in the salvation of souls. But the instances are rare,—rare as light-houses on the North-West Coast. Our sympathies and energies are distributed among a variety of objects. Our eye is not single,—our heart is divided. Undertaking too many things, our resources are dissipated, and we do nothing effectively. Our life is but a span, and our ability is finite ; let us endeavor to do one thing, and do it well.

2. *Simplicity of means.* It is an assumption of modern wisdom, that the gospel cannot be made effectual among the heathen, unless civilization precede and prepare the way. "Send first the school-master, and the mechanic, and the agriculturist; afterwards the missionary." This counsel we hear not only from the world, but we regret to say from too many of the church. But besides betraying a secret infidelity respecting the real efficacy of the gospel, it is a virtual impeachment of the wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has arranged an order of things entirely the reverse.

Thus we have been confidently assured, as if it were a settled axiom, that the gospel cannot advance at home, and that we must expect no more revivals of religion in the south or the north, in the west or the east, until certain evils are removed, certain dominant vices suppressed. Moral reform, it is said, must precede the triumphs of the cross. And by these specious theories, have thousands of the people of God been unhappily deluded, and, leaving their appropriate work of preaching the gospel and distributing the Bible, they have seized the pickaxe and gone to beating down the obstacles which they have learned to think the Christian religion can neither remove nor transcend. Sadly for themselves and for the world, do they forget that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

The primitive Christians acted on the principle that the gospel is the grand pioneer, fitted above all else to make crooked things straight, and rough places plain. If fatigue duty was to be performed, in order to open a way for the easy progress of the King of Zion, they desired no better instruments than the truths of his own glorious gospel. They understood that moral reform proceeds best in the *train* of Christ and his cross, and hence, for the regeneration of a degraded and miserable world, they used no other instrumentality. They, in their simplicity, regarded the gospel as the divinely appointed catholicon,—the one efficacious remedy of all moral evils. They supposed that if individuals or communities could be brought completely under its influence, they would renounce all sin, and cultivate all righteousness. Brethren, if the gospel does not rectify what is wrong in man, can you inform us of any system of truth or of agencies that will do it? You cannot predispose men's hearts to welcome the truth of God by any external means whatever,—not even by the potent influence of grammars and lexicons, globes and orreries, spelling-books and newspapers, spinning jennies and steam engines. But the simple story of the cross does execution in all places,—in the German university and the Northumberland colliery, in the Louisiana cotton-field and the Lowell factory, in the Putawatomy wigwam and the Karen jungle. And when sinners are once converted by the grace of God, then they begin to estimate rightly the importance of their being; then

they recognise their relations to Jehovah and to one another, and the work of improvement may proceed successfully, for it has a basis and an object. "Seek first the kingdom of God," and all these minor results shall be superadded.

3. *Judicious application of their means.* You may cool water downwards, but you must heat it upwards. So with society; it deteriorates downwards and improves upwards. If the upper classes become vicious, they descend; if the lower become virtuous, they rise. This fact was manifestly recognised by Christ and his apostles, for they directed their attention chiefly to the lower strata of the social mass. Had they commenced with the upper, they would doubtless have succeeded with a single stratum, but all beneath would have remained untouched by gracious influences. But by beginning with the lower, they acted wisely, as he acts wisely who kindles the fire beneath a fluid instead of above it. They wrought upwards, and the results amazed even themselves. We reverse the order, and work downwards, and then wonder that the effects are so limited. Let us conform to the simple order of nature, as well as to primitive example, and both at home and abroad, PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR, and we shall soon rejoice in enlarged success.

They did not, like us, expend a large proportion of their resources upon mere machinery. They used but little of it, and the plan they adopted required but little. In rearing the temple of the Lord, we

lay out largely upon the scaffolding, what they devoted to the edifice. We pay great attention to *modes* of usefulness; they, willing to do good in the way prescribed by their Master, were intent solely upon the *usefulness*. We engage freely in matters remotely connected with our great, our appointed business; they "let the dead bury their dead," and went every where preaching that men should repent and turn to God. We devote weeks and months to the glorious privilege of "free discussion;" they allowed the potsherds to strive, and improved their time in preaching the gospel to the destitute. How long is it since an ecclesiastical body in a single session, squandered seventeen years of ministerial time in the discussion of points very slightly associated with the work assigned them by the Head of the church? As the result of the whole, has there been, or is there likely to be a single soul converted? Alas! results of a very different character may be apprehended, results over which demons will exult, and seraphim weep.

During the next three weeks this great city will be thronged with the servants of Christ, come up from the face of the whole land, like the heads of the tribes to Zion. Are they coming here to preach the "everlasting gospel?" To do good to souls? Will they burn with irrepressible desire for the conversion of the guilty thousands and hundreds of thousands who crowd the broadway to hell? We come here to consult about sending the gospel to the distant heathen, while around us, within a circle of

two miles radius, are a quarter of a million human beings as much without hope as any pagans on earth, and for whom it shall be less tolerable in the judgment than for Sodom and Gomorrah! How long ought we to sit here debating a point of order, discussing an amendment to a resolution, adjusting the phraseology of a report, and passing votes of thanks to each other for services which Christ views as culpably imperfect? O brethren, if Paul and James were here, what would they do?

4. *Personal effort.* The primitive Christian regarded himself as a centre from which the voice of truth was to go forth over the whole circle of his influence. Every individual added to the church considered himself as an agent for propagating the news of salvation to his neighbors, who were in turn to communicate it to others, and they to others beyond them, and thus onward, till a chain of living voices should have been carried around the globe, and earth from the equator to the poles made vocal with the cry of them whose feet are beautiful upon the mountains, who bring glad tidings, and publish peace. Cherishing a conviction of individual responsibility, they were not content to do good merely by proxy. Their piety, in all its aspects, was essentially missionary, and each member felt himself to be consecrated, by his very profession, to the great work of evangelizing the world. When, therefore, a man was converted, he was immediately found moving among the impenitent, persuading them to flee from

the wrath to come. And this he did, not more from a desire for the salvation of souls, than from love to the Saviour, and a conviction that it was his appropriate business,—an essential part of his “high calling.” In the aggressive movements of the “sacramental host,” he considered himself as drawn to serve, and he neither sought nor desired exemption. In the great cause at issue between God and man, he felt that he was subpoenaed as a witness for his Sovereign, and when his testimony was wanted, he was never among the missing.

The churches were then so many missionary societies. Each congregation of Christians, duly organized according to the laws of Christ, became first a focus into which the sanctified excellence of earth might be collected, and then a centre from which the light of truth and holiness might radiate in all directions. Hence the seven churches of Asia were represented as “seven golden candlesticks.” Every church, “holding forth the word of life,” was the pharos of a benighted world, flinging a hallowed radiance far over the stormy waters.

Missionary was then the highest style of ministerial character. The principal men, the most capable and influential,—the “sons of consolation,” and the “sons of thunder,” not satisfied with remaining at home, and sending men of inferior powers and endowments, went themselves to the work, and with their own lips related the story of Calvary, and bared their own heads to the tempests of persecution.

It may well be questioned whether the committee of the English Baptist Mission did not perpetrate a grievous mistake when they refused to send to India that eminent man of God, the seraphic Pearce ; and whether the London Society did not err exceedingly when they declined the offer of Dr. Reed to proceed to China, and occupy the breach where a giant had fallen. Both societies have unhappily confirmed the popular impression, that men of ordinary ability will do for missionaries, — that ministers who are capable of great usefulness at home, cannot be spared for the heathen.

Let us not wonder that modern missions, when compared with the ancient, are so limited in their efficiency. We probably expend more money in the enterprise than they did ; but our piety is not like theirs, missionary piety ; our zeal is not like theirs, missionary zeal ; our activity is not like theirs, missionary activity. We probably talk and write as much about converting the world as they did ; but we act less, we give less of personal labor. To the many designations given to the present age, we may properly add “the age of resolutions.” Under the head of “Resolved,” we all announce what we believe and what we deny, what we desire and what we deprecate, what we have done and what we intend to do. But the most of these resolutions, contemplating action, are never executed, simply because no one of the conclave that passed them feels personally responsible for their execution. Individuality is merged in the mass, and obligation that

presses upon the whole, is unfelt by the separate confederates. I and We are different words, and it is too often forgotten that the former is included in the latter. If some brother, three years ago, had said, "I resolve, by the blessing of God, this year to raise one hundred thousand dollars for foreign missions," very likely it would have been accomplished. A hundred or more of us said unanimously, "WE will do it," and not an additional thousand did the resolution bring into your treasury.

Not thus did the primitive Christians manage their matters. If any thing was to be done, instead of calling meetings, making speeches, passing resolutions, and then leaving the work undone, they went directly themselves and did it. How rightly is one book of the New Testament named, not the Resolutions, but the Acts of the Apostles. *Non dicta, sed acta Apostolorum.*

O how changed would be the aspect of the church, if her ministers and members would come up to the same standard of feeling, and principle, and action, recognising in equal degree the claims of a world lying in wickedness, and their obligations to the world's Redeemer. Just suppose that the Church of England should lay aside her secular character, and become strictly a religious body, a missionary church, spiritual, self-denying, enterprising, how luminous would be her glory, now so tarnished,—how mighty through God her power, now so paralysed! Consecrating all her wealth, talent and intelligence to the cause of Christ, what triumphs

might she not achieve? Let her archbishop and all her titled prelates, laying aside the paraphernalia of outward distinction, — the pitiful remnants of Romish folly, — and vacating their seats in the halls of legislation, become missionaries of the cross, such as Paul and Peter, Apollos and Timothy, going forth in the spirit of apostles, not to advance a sect, or to distribute the prayer-book, but to convert the pagan world to Christ Jesus, then would she become what she is not now, and what nothing but humiliation and sacrifice will make her, “the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth.”

What but their Christian simplicity and missionary zeal have made our Moravian brethren the agents of so much good, the theme of such universal commendation? They commenced the work of missions to the heathen when their whole number did not exceed six hundred. They now reckon probably not more than ten thousand, none of whom are wealthy. But they continue to support more stations and more laborers, and make annually more converts to Christ on foreign ground, than the whole Baptist denomination in the United States.

Brethren, we are culpably deficient in duty. We are not doing good in proportion to our ability. We act not in accordance with our knowledge of the wants of a fallen world, and the will of our sovereign Saviour. However it may be in other departments of moral action, it is certain that here, where the most fervid enthusiasm is but cool sobriety, and

where it is hardly possible to be extravagant ; here, in the holy cause of missions ; here, if no where else, we actually sacrifice zeal to prudence, or to something which we call prudence, but which the apostles would have called timidity, or unbelief, or perhaps covetousness. Anxious on the one hand to avoid a blind, headlong impetuosity, we have on the other diverged too far into a cold, calculating policy. Acting with cautious reference to the state of the funds, we lose sight of the promises that encourage adventure, and choose rather to walk by sight than by faith. Unwilling to trust the great Promiser for a long time, or to a large amount, we treat him too much in the commercial spirit, and under the pretext of doing a safe business, we do comparatively nothing. O brethren, we have scarcely begun to feel as the whole church must feel before the world will believe us to be in earnest, and before we can rationally pray for the divine blessing upon our endeavors. We need more of the spirit of evangelical enterprise,—the hallowed spirit that glowed in the bosoms of Paul and the primitive disciples ; of Luther and his associate reformers ; of Brainerd, and Schwartz, and Carey ; and more than all, in the bosom of Him who “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” The energy we want is that which springs from sympathy with the grandeur of our object, the dignity of our calling, the desirableness of our success. We need a zeal that shall be kindled by an unclouded view of the condition and destiny

of a guilty world ;—a zeal that shall burn as if we had just come from beholding the crucifixion of the Son of God ;—a zeal that shall be willing to be stigmatized as extravagant, and to wait a century to be appreciated ;—a zeal that no discouragement can repress, no opposition smother ;—a zeal like that of the “ Prince of life,” absorbing us, eating us up ;—a zeal that shall admit of no repose, and intermit no exertion, until the gospel shall have been preached to the last of the species, and the Redeemer, surrendering his mediatorial commission, shall proclaim to the universe that he is SATISFIED.

